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ONAWAMA THEATRE Every Wednesday Evening THE TROY HEARTS

CHAPTER XV.

The Masked Voice.

For a matter of twelve hours the fog, leaden, dank, viscous, as inextinguishable as the dominion of evil, had wrapped the world in an embrace as foul and noxious as the coils of some great, gray, almy serpent.

Through its sluggish folds the ponderous, power-impelled lifeboat crept at a snail's pace, its stem parting and rolling back from either flank a heavy-hearted sea of gray.

In the bows a young woman rested in a state of semi-exhaustion, her eyes closed, her head pillowed on a cork belt life-preserver. Her sudden garments modeled closely to the slender body that was ever and again shaken from head to foot with the strength of a long, shuddering respiration.

Seated on the nearest thwart, Alan, Law, chin in hand, watched over the rest of this woman whom he loved with a grimly hopeless solicitude. He was in no happier case than she, so far as physical comfort went—he was in worse, since he might not rest.

Premeditation of misfortune darkened his heart with its impenetrable shadow.

In the stern Tom Barcus presided more fully over the steering gear; and Law was no more jealously heedful of his sweetheart than Barcus of the heavy-duty motor that chugged away so purposefully at its business of driving the boat heaven-knew-where.

Lacking at once a compass, all notion whatsoever of the sun's bearings, and any immediate hope of the fog lifting or chance bringing them either to land or to rescue by some larger and less comfortable craft, Barcus steered mainly through force of habit—the salt-water man's instinctive feeling that no boat under way should ever in any conceivable circumstance be without a head at the helm. It had seemed impossible that it could long escape repetition of the disaster, but somehow, it always did escape, and that by a wide margin; never once had it passed near enough to another vessel to see it.

And now for more than an hour the silence had been unbrokenly constant, broken only by the rumble of the motor, the muted lip of water slipping down the side, the suck and gurgle of the wake.

Forebodings no less portentous than Law's crawled in the mind of Barcus. It was as likely as not that the lifeboat was traveling straight out to sea. And gasoline tanks can and oftentimes do become as empty as an official weather prophet's promise of fair weather for a holiday.

More than this, Mr. Barcus was a confirmed skeptic in respect of marine motors; on terms of long and intimate experience with the ways of



Delivered into the Hands of the Enemy.

the demon of perversity that tempts them one and all, he knew that the present sweet-tempered performance of the exhibit under consideration was no earnest whatsoever of future good behavior, that when such a complicated contraption was concerned there was never any telling.

In view of all of which considerations he presently threw open the battery switch.

And the aching void created in the silence by the cessation of that uniform drone was startling enough to rouse even Rose Trine from her state of semi-somnolence.

With a look of panic she sat up, thrust damp hair back from her eyes, and nervously inquired:

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing," Barcus told her. "I shut the engine off—that's all."

Temper was short in that hour, and Alan was annoyed to think that the rest of his beloved should needlessly have been disturbed.

"What did you do that for?" he demanded sharply.

"Because I jolly well wanted to," Barcus returned in a tone as brusque, "Oh, you did—oh?"

"Yes, I did—eh! I happen to be bawling this end of the boat and to have sense enough to realize there's no sense at all in our wasting fuel the way we are—grinding now!"

"Well," Law contended, struck by the fairness of this argument, but unable to calm his uneasiness—"Just the same, we might—"

"Yes, of course, we might," Barcus snapped. "We might a whole lot. We might, for instance, be heading for Spain, for all you or I know to the contrary. And in such case, I for one respectfully prefer to have gas enough to take us home again if ever this gas-blessed fog lifts!"

And for several seconds longer the stillness strangled their spirits in its ruthless grasp.

Then of a sudden a cry shrieked through the fog, so near at hand that it seemed scarcely more distant than over the side:

"Aho! Help! Aho! Help! Help!"

"Aho! Help! Aho! Help! Help!"

"Aho! Help! Aho! Help! Help!"

"What can it be?" Rose whispered, against, shrinking into Alan's ready arm.

"A woman," Barcus put in harshly. "Judith," the girl moaned.

Alan shook himself together. "Impossible!" he contended. "I saw her go down."

"That doesn't prove she didn't come up," Barcus commented scoldingly. "Aho! Motorboat aho-o! Help!"

"And that," Barcus pursued sadly, "just proves she did come up—blame the luck! Alive she is, and kicking."

"Just proves she did come up—blame the luck! Alive she is, and kicking."

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Yanked Him Off to His Cell.

far. That's the answer; they were picked up, stole a boat, and piled it up on the reef."

"And there's no hope—!"

"Only of the fog relenting. If we could make the mainland and get help."

His accents died away into a disconsolate silence that was unbroken for upward of an hour.

So slowly the current bore the lifeboat toward the beach and so still the tide that Barcus never appreciated their way within touch of any land until the bows grounded with a slight jar and a grating sound.

With a cry of incredulity he leaped to his feet—"Land, by all that's lucky!"—and stooping, lent a hand to the girl, aiding her to rise.

Hardly had Rose had time to comprehend what had happened, when Barcus was over the side and wrestling with the bows, dragging the boat farther upon the shoals.

She was, however, more than one man could manage; and when her stem had bitten a little more deeply into the sands, Barcus gave over the attempt and, lifting Rose down, set her on dry land, then climbed back into the vessel, rummaged over her anchor and cable, and carried them ashore, planting the former well up towards the foot of the cliff.

And as he rose from this last labor he was half blinded by the glare of the wetting sun as it broke through the fog.

In less than five minutes the miraculous commonplace was an accomplished fact; the wind had rolled the fog back like a scroll and sent it spinning far out to sea, while the shore on which the two had landed was deluged with sunlight, bright and beautifully warm.

He showed a thoughtful and considerate countenance to the girl.

"You're about all in?"

"She nodded confirmation of this, which was no more than simple truth. "Where are we?" she asked.

"He made her party to his own perplexity.

"You're not able to travel," he pursued. "Do you mind being left alone while I take a turn up the beach and have a look round? We can't be far from some sort of civilization; even if it's an island there are no desert isles along this coast. I'll find something soon enough, for I know the land. By tacit consent both avoided mention of Alan, but each knew what thought was uppermost in the other's mind."

"There's a niche among the rocks up here," Barcus indicated, "almost as sure. You'll be warm and dry enough, and secure from observation overhead. And you can ever snatch a few winks of sleep."

She negatived that suggestion with a weary smile; no sleep for her until sheer exhaustion overpowered her, or she knew of Alan's fate.

And so, reiterating his promise to be gone no longer than absolutely might be needful, he left her there.

CHAPTER XVII.

This Mortal Tide.

She was very certain she would never sleep before her anxiety was assuaged by word of Alan's fate; but she reckoned without her host's trials that had bred in her a fatigues anonymous even to her mental anguish.

For a time after Barcus had left

She liked "Lucille Love" did you not? Well, you'll like "The Troy Hearts" better. Tomorrow next Wednesday night.

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The Oregon, Cal., (both) and Live Stock Protection Association of which the undersigned is a member, will give a \$1,500.00 reward for evidence leading to the arrest and conviction of any party or parties stealing horses, cattle or other livestock from any of its members.

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her she lingered upon the sands, in the mouth of the shelter he had elected for her, staring hungrily out at the shimmering sea that, now wholly devoid of its shroud, smiled up at the heavens, whose sapphirine face it mirrored, as fair and sweet of seeming as though it had never veiled a heartless tragedy.

Slowly it darkened as the sapphire above grew darker, blending insensibly into rare ultramarine by the slow decline of the sun, by whose altitude above the horizon the day had not more than ninety minutes to run. And she thought drowsily that if that sun sank without her learning that her lover lived, it would not rise again upon a world tenanted by Rose Trine.

It was not true, she told herself, that people never die of broken hearts.

She knew that, were he taken from her, she could no longer live.

And sleep overwhelmed her suddenly, like a great, dark cloud.

But its dominion over her faculties was not of long duration. Slowly, heavily, mutinously, she was rescued from its nirvana—came to her senses with an effort of one who emerges from some vast place of blackness and terror, to find himself kneeling over and gingerly but persistently shaking her by the shoulder.

And then she sat up with a cry of mystified compassion; for in the brief time that he had been absent—it had not been more than an hour—Mr. Barcus had most unquestionably been severely used.

He had acquired a long cut over one eye, but shallow, upon which blood had dried, together with a bruised and swollen cheek that was badly scratched to boot. And what simple articles of clothing remained to him, after his strenuous experiences of the last forty-eight hours, had been reduced to even greater simplicity; his shirt, for example, now lacked a sleeve that had been altogether torn away at the shoulder.

"No!" he told her, as soon as he saw her wits were awake once more—"don't waste time pitying me. I'm all right—and so is Alan! That's the main thing for you to understand; he's still as sound as a pound."

"But where is he? Take me to him!" she demanded, rising with a movement of such grace and vigor that it seemed hard to believe she had ever known an instant's weariness.

"That's the rub," Barcus confessed, squinting on the sands and knocking his hair. "I don't take you to him. Judith might object. Besides, you can see for yourself it isn't safe to mingle with the inhabitants of this tight little island—and you can't get to where Alan is without mingling considerably. Sit down, and I'll tell you all about it, and we'll try to figure out what's best to be done. Maybe we can manage a rescue under cover of night."

And when the girl had settled herself beside him he launched into a detailed report.

"It's Katama Island, all right," he announced, "but a change has come over the place since I visited it some years ago. To begin with, it was a community of simple-hearted villagers and fishermen; now, unless all signs fail, it's a den of smugglers. I noticed a number of Chinese about; and that, taken in connection with the fact that, when I ventured to introduce myself to the village ginnel and ask a few innocent questions of the Chinese population to a brick, landed on me like a thousand bricks—the two circumstances made me think we'd stumbled on to a settlement of earnest workers at the gentle art of helping poor Chinamen evade the excise laws."

With a wry smile, he pursued: "As for me, I landed just back of the point, on the cape of my neck, and took the count, surrounded by a lot of unsmiling, pathetic boxes and barrels that had seen better days. And when I came to and started to crawl unostentatiously away, I was just in time to witness the landing of your amiable sister, that gang of cutthroats she keeps on her tail, and Alan in company with his choice a crew of second-rate as you'd care to see. I gathered from a few words that leaked out of the back door of the barroom, that it was as I had thought—Judith had stolen a boat from the ship that picked her up, and rammed it on Norton's reef; and after she gathered Alan in the schooner of these smugglers happened along, and she hailed it and struck a bargain with the captain and signed co-partnership articles, or something like that. Any way, her lot and the Islanders were soon as thick as thieves, and tanking up so sociably that I actually got a chance to whisper a word to Alan and tell him you were all right, and that he'd find us both down here on the beach, if luck served him with an escape. That was all I got a chance to say, for Judith marched up just then and yanked him off to his cell. I mean to say, he's locked up now in a little stone hut on the edge of the cliff, with the door barred and a few look-outing a sheer drop of thirty feet or so to the beach. When I'd seen that much I calculated it was about time for me to get quit of that neighborhood, before Madame Judith nicked me with the evil eye."

"You don't think she saw you?" the girl cried.

"I don't think so," Barcus allowed gravely; and then, lifting his gaze, he added as he rose in a bound: "I just know she did—that's all."

In another instant he was battling might and main with three willing ruffians, who had come suddenly into view round a shoulder of rock; but his efforts were short-lived, foredoomed to failure. He was weak with suffering and fatigue—and the three were fresh and had the courage at least of their numbers. He was overborne in a twinkling, and had his face ground brutally into the sand while his hands were made fast with stout rope behind his back. And when he rose, it was to find, as he had anticipated, that Rose's resistance had been as futile as his own; she, too, was captive, her hands bound like his, the huge and ugly cleave paw of one of Judith's crew cruelly clamped upon her shoulders.

They were granted time to exchange no more than one despairing glance when a curt laugh fairly chilled the blood in Mr. Barcus, and he swung sharply between his two guards to confront Judith Trine.

The woman he saw at first glance, was in one of her most dangerous moods—if, Barcus mentally qualified, there was a pin to choose between her moods. But now, beyond dispute, she exhibited a countenance new in his experience with her, and one well calculated to appeal.

Her face was bloodless, even as her lips were white with the curb she put upon her passion. Her eyes were lurid with the glare of rage approaching mania. Her hands trembled, her lips quivered, all her actions were abrupt with nervousness.

He was by no means poor-spirited, but he shrank openly from the look she gave him, and was relieved when she, with a sneer, passed him by and planted herself squarely before her sister.

"Well!" she demanded brusquely. "How much longer do you think I'm going to tolerate your interference—your poor little fool! How many more lessons will you require before realizing that I mean to have my way, and that you'll cross me only to suffer for it?"

The courage of the other girl won the unaltered admiration of Mr. Barcus. Far from cowering, she seemed to find fresh heart in her sister's challenge. Her head was high, her glance level with limitless contempt as she replied:

"So you've tried again?" she inquired obliquely, with a tone of pity. "You've offered him your love yet another time, have you?"

"Silence!" Judith cried in fury. "Only to learn once more that he would rather die than that he would persist, unflinching. And so you come to take your spite out on me, do you? You pitiful thing! Do you think I mind—knowing as I do now that he could never hold you in anything but compassion and contempt?"

For an instant there was silence; by the scorn of her sister the heat of Judith's fury had been transformed into a cold and malignant rage. She controlled herself and her voice marvelously.

"You will see," she said in even and frigid accents. And the light of her mania leaped and leaped again in her eyes like a living flame. "I have prepared a way to make you understand what opposition to me means."

She waved a hand toward the point of rocks. "Take them along," she commanded.

The understanding between her and her men was apparently complete; for these last, without hesitation or further instructions, marched Rose and Barcus down to the end of the spit and on, into the water.

It was nearly knee-deep before Barcus was halted with a savage jerk, backed up to a rock, forced despite his frenzied resistance to sit down in the water, and, swiftly, with half a dozen

deft hitches of rope and a stanch knot, made fast in that position—submerged to his chest.

This accomplished, the men turned about, leaving her in a similar wise at Barcus' side.

Standing just above the water-line, with every sign of complete calm and sanity other than that ominous flickering in her eyes, Judith superintended the business till its conclusion, then waved the men away.

Quietly, like well-trained servants, they turned their backs and marched off.

And again, after a brief wait, the women laughed her short and mirthless laugh.

"The tide will be high," she said, "precisely at sunset. You may time your lives by that. When the sun dips into the sea, then will your lives go down with it."

She turned up her heel and strode swiftly away, with not so much as a backward glance, overtook her men, and passed quickly from sight around the farther point of rocks.

For some time Barcus struggled

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They Fought Like Madmen.

His throat could be so dry, so parched.

He opened his eyes, shuddering.

"It's good-by now," he faltered.

"Not yet!" her voice rang beside him, vibrant. "Look-up there—along the cliff!"

He lifted his gaze.

Two men were running along the cliff—and the man in the lead was Alan. But his lead was very scant, and the man who pursued was one of Judith's, and stuck to the trail like a bloodhound fresh from the leash.

And now the water was at his lips; Barcus could no more speak without strangling.

Of a sudden he groined in his heart; though there was no passable way down the cliff, still the sight of his friend alive and unharmed had brought with it a thrill of hope; now that hope died as he saw Alan stumble and go to his knees.

Before he could rise the other was upon him, with the fury of a wolf seeking the throat of a stag.

For an instant they fought like madmen; then, in a trice, the sky line of the cliff was empty; one or the other had tripped and fallen over the brink, and falling had retained hold of his enemy and carried him down as well.

By no chance, Barcus told himself, could either escape uninjured.

Yet, to his amazement, he saw one man break from the other's embrace and rise. And he who lay still, a crumpled, inhuman heap upon the sands, was Judith's man.

With a violent effort Barcus lifted his mouth above water and shrieked: "Alan! Alan! Help! Here—at the end of the point—in the water—help!"

A precious minute was lost before Alan discovered their two heads, so barely above that swiftly rising flood. Then he ran toward them as he had never run before, and as he came whipped out a jack-knife and freed his blade.

Even so—since it was, of course, Rose whom Alan freed the first—Barcus was half-drowned before Alan helped him to turn up to the beach.

And as this happened the last blood-red rim of the sun was washed under by the waves.

Two minutes later the lifeboat was afloat, and Mr. Barcus, already recovered, was laboring with the dyed-rail of the motor, stimulated to supreme exertion by the sight of a party, led by Judith, racing madly down the beach.

But it was not until well out from shore and on the way to the safety promised by the mainland—now readily discernible on the horizon—that any one of them found time for speech.

Then Mr. Barcus straightened up from his assiduous attentions to the motor, and observed:

"You bear a charmed life, my adventurous friend. I want to tell you that when I saw you go over that cliff I made up my mind your usefulness would be at least permanently impaired. As it is, I don't mind telling you that if ever I get out of this awful alive, I'm going to have a try at your life myself, just once, for luck!"

(To be continued.)

IN THE COUNTY COURT OF THE STATE OF OREGON FOR HARNEY COUNTY.

In the matter of the Estate of F. Cress Croxton, Dec'd.

To W. T. Croxton, Mary L. Croxton, Robert Croxton and Nannie Croxton, OREGONIERS.